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SUBJECT: RWANDA-FRANCE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS ON FAST TRACK

Classified By: Ambassador W. Stuart Symington for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (C) Visiting French MFA Director General of Administration Stephane Romatet told Ambassador on December 17 that the Quai d'Orsay planned to have a full-time political officer in Rwanda by early January, 2010 and an ambassador here later that month. He said France intends to start quickly, at President Kagame's request, providing development assistance on agriculture, education, and health. He asked the Ambassador's views on Rwanda's challenges and regional strategy and greeted warmly the U.S. offer of assistance during the start-up process and pledge of close cooperation in the future. At a collegial breakfast meeting hosted by the Belgian Ambassador to Rwanda, Romatet was joined by the Quai's desk officer for Rwanda Laurent Favier.

¶2. (C) Romatet said the rapid pace of France's diplomatic efforts reflected, in part, Foreign Minister Kouchner's keen personal interest in moving quickly. "It was one of a short-list of priorities he set when taking up the job" Romatet added, noting he had headed Kouchner's personal staff at the time. The pace also reflected President Sarkozy's intention to secure a Rwandan role in a possible spring 2010 Paris summit focused on economic integration and growth in the region. Favier noted that Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) President Kabila had signaled recently to France that it would be difficult for him to take part early in the new year. Favier added that a summit without the DRC did not make much sense. (In a personal aside, Romatet noted that Kouchner wanted to propose him for the ambassadorial post here, but he declined for family reasons-- the education of a child.)

¶3. (C) After welcoming Romatet's news and noting ongoing USG work in those areas, the Ambassador cited the recent positive impact of private sector-driven growth in the energy and agricultural sectors (methane gas, bio-fuels, food production, tea, coffee, pyrethrum). He suggested France consider investing quickly in Rwanda's Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program investment plan. Pointing out that much of Rwanda's economic production is located in the west of the country, he cited the agricultural, tourism, energy, and mining production of the areas bordering the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Uganda, and Burundi.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador underscored that Rwanda sees stability as essential to sustain private investment flows in those areas. That requires strengthening the relationship between Rwanda and the DRC so that people can be put to productive work on both sides of the border. It also requires concerted efforts to ensure that regional economic integration is widely seen to benefit both countries' capitals, not just their border regions. Rwanda seeks to serve as a bridge between the Francophone west and Anglophone east and a hub for growth. Like the other Great Lake states, Rwanda must promote intra-African trade and cross-regional integration if

it is to turn from being a trading block fringe to an African economic hub, its long-term vision. Romatet agreed that such a strategy made sense for Rwanda and would benefit the region as a whole.

¶5. (SBU) The meeting took place a day after Rwanda named its own ambassador-designate to France (septel).

¶6. (C) Comment: Romatet reflected enthusiasm at the prospect of reopening France's mission, even though he eschewed the ambassadorial job. He said France would face considerable expense - and some delay - before restoring its cultural center and other facilities here to service, but that would not keep it from "hoisting the flag" in January. He praised close U.S.-French cooperation on Great Lakes issues in capitals and New York and was visibly pleased by the prospect of an equally close relationship with the U.S. here. Restoring France's diplomatic facilities will be only a minor challenge compared to re-branding the French-Rwandan relationship. That will be difficult to do entirely until the French case against senior Rwandan officials is resolved and until the French and Rwandan publics have more of a shared version of France's past role in Rwanda than they do today. End Comment.

SYMINGTON